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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Eastfield College, Texas, to assess the impact of remedial reading instruction on the academic achievement of students with reading skill deficiencies. The study involved all students whose basic skills were assessed at Eastfield College and who received academic advisement between April 1978 and August 1978 (N=898). Of the students, 66% (N=586) scored above 9.2 on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. Of the 313 students who scored below 9.0 on the test, 33% enrolled in a developmental reading course and 45% did not. Students' records were subsequently monitored for two years to identify significant differences between the groups in terms of average hours attempted, average hours completed, attrition, and grade point average (GPA). The study revealed that: (1) the students reading at a 9.2 grade reading level attempted an average of 9.2 hours per semester, completed an average of 7.4 hours, had an 80% persistence rate, and earned a GPA of 3.0; (2) the poor readers who took the reading improvement course attempted an average of 8.7 hours per semester, completed an average of 6.4 hours, had a persistence rate of 26%, and had a GPA of 2.9; and (3) the poor readers who did not take the reading course attempted an average of 5.7 hours per semester, completed an average of 3.3 hours, persisted at a rate of 58%, and had a GPA of 2.6. Implications of the findings for institutional accountability are discussed in the study report. (JP)

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Credibility through Accountability in A Community College Reading Program

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Mesquite, Texas

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Introduction

Presently, America is in a "back to the basics" attitude because of nation-wide declines in student literacy. Isaac Asimov (1:19) refers to American society as a "cult of ignorance" because of our apparent anti-intellectual mood for the past twenty years. I do not push for elitism, but I do expect that a community college graduate can read. As educators, we have stated to the public that "learning is the key to life." I submit that we are wrong. Competence is the key to life! And, without the ability to read fluently, one major avenue to any competency is blocked. Developmental educators provide competence and everyone must be told.

Problem

Reading professionals responsible for the defacto education of disadvantaged students have been reticent, or simply have not been willing, to report to the "significant others" research which proves the efficacy of their programs. Levinson (2) points out that both administrators and faculty want proof.

Credibility and accountability need not be feared. We know that what we do has a positive impact on our students. We need to report it. If we are facilitators of instruction, then, also, we are facilitators of information. We must manage our resources like ad men. Administrators and faculty are marketing targets to be manipulated by the illusion that they are persons who decide for themselves. We must become

soft-sell hucksters -- sources of quick, effortless, and useful information on what is so good about our developmental programs. Administrators and faculty must depend on us. That dependency is arrived at by periodic reports on profitability, i.e.,

1. How do "poor" readers" perform in college courses?
2. Does the college/community benefit from allowing its students the freedom to make "real" academic/career decisions even though past performance and basic literacy assessment strongly suggests alternative courses of action?
3. Do students who successfully complete reading improvement courses succeed in academic areas?

The answers to these questions are the "stuff" of which we must concern ourselves. One need not be a research specialist nor utilize dissertation trivia of chi square, t-test or regression-discontinuity design. We are not Harvard. We are not mini-universities. We are practitioners working with real people with real problems. Always -- be pragmatic -- write reports, report trends. Remember, the target audience of your information is <u>not</u> statistically sophisticated either.

Design

Eastfield College has a majority of excellent students

and very good readers. But, too many "poor" readers matriculate into all college courses. This research project deals with attrition/retention/recruitment of "poor" readers. Poor readers are those students ranging from severely handicapped clinical cases through those students reading four years or more below grade level.

Through a computer search and retrieval, the project systematically tracked and compared, for two years, new students at Eastfield College who in the Fall of 1978 scored below 9.0 grade level on the Nelson Denny Reading Test, Form C, Comprehension Subtest, during assessment/advisement prior to registration. The students thus identified were separated into two categories:

DIDDERS - Those students who did take a reading improvement course as well as other courses as the assessment/advisement suggested.

NOTTERS - Those students who did not take a reading improvement course but, rather, went directly into the regular college curriculum even though assessment/advisement suggested a real need to improve basic reading skills.

Selection Results

Only those students who took the assessment of basic skills at Eastfield College and had counselor advisement prior to registration were selected for this study. Students from April 10, 1978, through August 14, 1978, were included.

Although many other students took the assessment package during Fall, 1978, they were not included because they did not have adequate skills information prior to registration. Of the 2,691 students assessed only 898 students received scores with the advisement process prior to registration.

STUDENTS WHO TOOK ASSESSMENT AFTER REGISTRATION	1793 =	66%
*STUDENTS WHO TOOK ASSESSMENT PRIOR REGISTRATION	898 =	34%
TOTAL STUDENTS	2691 =	100%
NELSON DENNY SCORE ABOVE 9.2 READING GRADE LEVEL	586 =	66%
*NELSON DENNY SCORE BELOW 9.0 READING GRADE LEVEL	313 =	34%
TOTAL STUDENTS	898 =	100%
NELSON DENNY SCORE BELOW 9.0 GRADE LEVEL, DIDDERS	103 =	33%
NELSON DENNY SCORE BELOW 9.0 GRADE LEVEL, NOTTERS	141 =	45%
*ASSESS/ADVISE BUT NOT REGISTERED ...	69 =	22%
	313	100%

Discussion

Three immediate problems were easily identifiable. The first was 66% of the students did not go through assessment/advisement before registration and hence could not make real choices about their skills as relates to the courses they selected. The second problem was only one-third of the students who were suggested to improve their reading through the assessment/advisement process acted on that suggestion. The third problem was the "loss" of 69 poor reading students who never came back to enroll at Eastfield College. These 69 students had already invested time in several visits to the

campus, i. e., application to the college, several hours undergoing assessment and counselor advisement. Their scores were low enough that they could not have matriculated into the university system.

The institution truly lost 69 potential students because of the "time delay" of assessment/advisement and registration. If these students had enrolled in coursework which included a reading improvement course, Eastfield College could have expected to realize an additional 38,419.2 contact hour funds, or a projected increase of approximately $115,257.60.

Equally as important, Eastfield would have educationally salvaged these students to be even more productive members of our community as relates specifically to our mission. The efforts of institution as well as faculty recruitment was undermined when closure was not provided in a timely way. The humanism and student centeredness we projected was lost for all intents and purposes when the student's commitment was delayed by days, weeks, months waiting for registration to "happen."

Tracking Results

Once the appropriate students were selected, a computer search of each student's transcript was accomplished. The retrieved transcripts tracked each student from Fall, 1978, through Fall, 1980. An analysis for comparison between DIDDERS and NOTTERS in terms of semester hours attempted, semester hours completed, persistence rates, attrition rates,

and overall grade point averages was performed. Likewise, a computer search and retrieval was accomplished on grade level readers performances in each area for purposes of comparison.

	GRADE LEVEL READERS	POOR READERS	
		DIDDERS	NOTTERS
AVERAGE HOURS ATTEMPTED	9.2	8.7	5.7
AVERAGE HOURS COMPLETED	7.4	6.4	3.3
AVERAGE PERSISTENCE RATE	80%	74%	58%
AVERAGE ATTRITION RATE	20%	26%	42%
AVERAGE GPA	3.0	2.9	2.6

Discussion

The students who needed to improve their reading skills and pursued a corrective mode by selecting to take a reading improvement course as part of their regular course of study significantly outperformed their peers who needed reading but chose to go headlong into academic coursework. It is important to note that the DIDDERS averaged almost a 3/4 time FTSE load for two years while the NOTTERS averaged less than 1/2 time FTSE in the same period. Poor readers who did take a reading improvement course performed as well as grade level readers in college coursework. It seems that skills taught in reading improvement courses allows even poor readers to compete successfully in academic and technical courses. But, poor readers who do not take reading improvement courses attempt less courses and complete less coursework. It appears that the less well a student reads, the less coursework he attempts.

The attrition rates also explains Eastfield's retention

problem. The students who needed to improve their reading and didn't, dropped 42% of their coursework taken in the two year period. The students who did improve their reading successfully persisted through their coursework 74% of the time and with good grades. The grade level readers' performance as relates to persistence and attrition seem at parity with the DIDDERS. However, poor readers who did not take a reading improvement course were left far behind.

The difference in semester hours attempted between the DIDDERS and NOTTERS represents approximately $100,000 lost through contact hours by Eastfield College because of a lack of pro-active academic intervention strategies. Studies by Rouche (3) and others indicate that students reading two years or more behind grade level are 50% unsuccessful in college. Eastfield is very close to his warning. An additional $115,000 was lost because students who went through application/assessment/advisement did not show up to register for any courses -- the right ones or the wrong ones!

Conclusions

The reading improvement courses offered at Eastfield provide academic assistance to poor readers which allowed them to gain success in college coursework. The reading program is fulfilling the mission and goals for which it was established. However, Eastfield College's present procedures in dealing with poor readers during the assessment/advisement phase sets the stage for high attrition, loss of students in

recruitment, the forfeiture of thousands of contact hour funds, and the deprivation of student's right to an education. The advisement policy toward students is the embodiment of the Spanish proverb, "Take what you want -- and pay for it." To me, the price we extract from our underprepared students is far too high! It is immoral to allow any student to make choices that will kill his chances for success. We must provide opportunities not problems.

Implications

Reliable evaluative data can be collected and reported without the super-sophisticated statistical strategies discussed by Trillin (4) and others. Answers to simple but extremely important questions regarding the efficacy of reading programs can be answered by any reading professional. We have always collected data-we simply have not taken the next step, which is to write it up. For too long we have relied upon administrators and faculty for support -- now they must rely on us. Indeed, we are charged with proving the worth of our programs: It can be done with limited time and energy!

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